**Unit 1. Communications**

**Gender Differences in Language**

**Topic Preview**

Work in small groups. Discuss the questions below.

1. How do little boys and girls play? Are their games different?
2. Who did you play with when you were a child? What games did you play? What did you talk about?
3. Who do you spend your free time with now? What things do you talk about?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Write A (agree) or D (disagree). Compare and explain your answers.

* Men and women communicate differently.
* It's important to understand how men and women communicate differently.
* Male and female communication styles are becoming more similar.
* Inherited biological factors have more influence on communication style than social environment.
* Men use nonverbal communication more skillfully than women.

**Vocabulary Preview**

1. **The boldfaced words below are from a lecture about male and female communication. Read each sentence. Guess the meaning of the boldfaced word. Compare your answers in small groups.**
2. People often have the stereotype that women are kinder, more considerate, and less aggressive than men. This is not always true, of course!
3. Different speaking styles among different social groups can result in segregation. Communities that speak one way might not mix with communities that speak differently.
4. Contemporary language includes many slang expressions that used to be considered unacceptable.
5. The style of the magazine article gave me the impression that the author was male.
6. If a marriage is to be successful, it's crucial that both partners understand each other's "language."
7. Our deeply held ideas about male and female communication are often reinforced by the movies we watch and the books we read.
8. Nowadays, men and women exhibit increasingly similar communication styles.
9. We normally establish our patterns of language behavior early in life.
10. It's not clear exactly how much of one's communication style is inherent and how much is learned after birth.
11. The way people talk can have a dramatic effect on their career opportunities.
12. Much research has been devoted to understanding the causes of gender differences in language.
13. Men and women typically engage in different kinds of conversations.
14. **The words below are also from the lecture. Read their definitions and the example phrases or sentences.**

* collaboration (n) the act of working together to make or produce something: Our departments worked in close collaboration on the *project*.
* condition *(v)* to make a person or animal think or behave in a particular way by influencing or training them over a period of time: [condition sb to (do) sth] The American public has been conditioned to think that this is just the way things.
* genetic (adj) relating to GENES or GENETICS: *They now have a genetic test for that disease./ genetic mutations*
* nature *(n)* ['neɪʧə] everything that exists in the world that is not made or controlled by humans, such as animals, plants, weather, etc.: We like camping; it makes us feel closer to nature.
* nurture ['nɜːʧə] *(n)* formal the education and care that you are given as a child, and the way it affects your later development and attitudes
* **-oriented** [in adjectives] **work-oriented/family-oriented**, etc. mainly concerned with or paying attention to work, family, etc.: *an export-oriented company /The resort offers a variety of family-oriented entertainment.*

**Taking Better Notes**

**Noting Comparisons and Contrasts**

In a lecture that includes comparisons and contrasts, it is important to note how items are similar or different.

The words and phrases below are used to indicate similarities, or comparisons.

like likewise as... as

also ditto as with ... so too with . .

not only . . . but also similar to / similarly in a similar manner

both . . . and . . . parallels in like fashion in the same way

The words and phrases below are used to indicate differences, or contrasts.

but more (than) whereas

while less (than) on the other hand

different from rather than dissimilar to

in contrast unlike although

however conversely

One way to take notes that compare and contrast two or more items is to note each item separately, and then note the similarities and differences. Look at the example below.

*Formal communication*

* *no slang*
* *complete sentences*
* *polite forms*

*Informal communication*

* *some slang*
* *incomplete sentences*
* *fewer polite forms*

Another way is to note each point of comparison and contrast separately. Look at the example below.

*Formal Informal*

*Vocabulary no slang some slang*

*Sentences complete incomplete*

*Forms polite fewer polite*

Work with a partner. Student A, compare and contrast people you know well (for example, two family members). Explain the similarities and differences. Student B, take notes. Compare the notes with the explanation. Then change roles.

When you listen to a lecture, try to include some comparisons and contrasts in your notes.

**Listening to the Lecture**

**Before You Listen**

You will hear a lecture about male and female communication styles. Check (✓) the topics you think the speaker might discuss.

1. Why men and women speak different languages

2. How schools affect communication styles

3. How boys' and girls' playtime activities differ

4. How men's and women's clothing styles differ

5. How social status affects communication styles

6. How genetics affects communication style

7. Male and female socialization patterns

**Listening for Main Ideas**

1. **Close your book. Listen to the lecture and take notes.**
2. **Use your notes to answer the questions below. Two answers are correct. Cross out the incorrect answer.**
3. Why is communication style important?
   1. It affects how people see and respond to us.
   2. It shows how we see our own status.
   3. It teaches us about the structure of the brain.
4. According to the speaker, what are the main causes of language differences?
   1. genetic factors
   2. contemporary books
   3. socialization
5. In general, how do male and female communication styles differ?
   1. Male communication is more competition-oriented.
   2. Female communication is more family-oriented.

**c**. Women use nonverbal communication more skillfully.

1. How do parental communication styles differ?
   1. Mothers are more controlling than fathers.
   2. Fathers are more supportive than mothers.

**c**. Fathers are more concerned with identifying problems than mothers.

1. According to the speaker, what are the main purposes of men's communication?
   1. to achieve goals
   2. to establish relationships
   3. to give information
2. According to the speaker, what might cause male and female communication styles to become more similar?
   1. changing children's playtime activities
   2. decreasing segregation between boys and girls
   3. increasing women's authority in the workplace

**Listening for Details**

1. Close your book. Listen to the lecture again. Add supporting details to your notes and correct any mistakes.
2. Use your notes to decide if the statements below are true or false. Write T (true) or F (false). Correct the false statements.
3. Most students are interested in the issue of gender differences in communication.
4. We spend 60 percent of our working hours communicating.
5. Genetic factors do not influence male and female communication styles.
6. Playing house can help create a collaboration-oriented communication style.
7. Having discussions about relationships helps develop a competition-oriented communication style.
8. Traditional gender roles affect how parents talk to their children.
9. Between the 1920s and the 1990s, women's conversations about work and money rose over 30 percent.
10. Male and female communication styles are the same in all cultures.

**Using Your Notes**

1. Work with a partner. Exchange notes. Take turns using your partner's notes to compare and contrast the following items.
   * + 1. Boys'and girls'activities
       2. Fathers' and mothers' communication with children
       3. Purposes of mens and women's communication
       4. Men's and women's topics of communication
       5. Men's and women's body language

Discuss how to make the comparisons and contrasts in your notes clearer.

1. Use your notes to write a summary of the lecture.

**Projects**

* 1. In small groups, review your lecture notes. List the speaker's conclusions. Then discuss the questions below.
     1. In your opinion, which of the speaker's conclusions are generally true? Why?
     2. In your opinion, which of the speaker's conclusions are stereotypes? Why?
     3. What other factors might influence gender differences in communication?
  2. Work with a partner. Compare and contrast how men and women communicate in your culture. Make a chart showing the similarities and differences. Compare your charts as a class.
  3. Record a three- to five-minute English conversation from a television show or video. Then transcribe it. Bring your transcription to class and read it aloud. Have your classmates guess whether the speakers are men or women. Ask them what factors influenced their decision.

**UNIT 8 QUIZ**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | a. | Women's conversations about work and money |
|  | b. | The number of women in the workforce |
|  | c. | The amount of time boys and girls play together |
| 2. | a. | The speaker's gender |
|  | b. | The speaker's communication style |
|  | c. | The speaker's status |
| 3. | a. | 30 |
|  | b. | 40 |
|  | c. | 70 |
| 4. | a. | 60 |
|  | b. | 75 |
|  | c. | 99 |
| 5. | a. | Intimacy-related |
|  | b. | Collaboration-oriented |
|  | c. | Competition-oriented |
| 6. | a. | Women and clothes |
|  | b. | Business and money |
|  | c. | Food and drink |

1. Listen to each question. Circle the letter of the correct answer.
2. Answer each question. Use complete sentences.
   1. What factors cause gender differences in communication?

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2. How do typical playtime activities for boys and girls differ?

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**audioscript**

**Gender Differences in Language**

TEACHER: Morning, everyone. You'll recall we began look­ing at gender differences last week, and I'd like to continue that theme today and focus on male and female communi­cation styles—the differences between the way men and women communicate. Let me start by saying the issue of gender differences in communication seems to be an inter­esting one for most people—certainly for most students. Anyone like to suggest why?

STUDENT 1:I think because most of us are looking for part­ners, a long-term love relationship . . . you know? So it helps to understand the opposite sex, so we can communi­cate with them better.

TEACHER: Well, that probably is one major reason—so we can get along better. The truth is, gender differences have fascinated mankind for as long as people have been writing down their thoughts, from as far back as the story of Adam and Eve to contemporary books. And although numerous books and articles have been written on the subject, almost all of them draw the same conclusion: Men and women speak different languages. I'll bet most of us here have read or at least heard of some book that talks about why men and women can't talk to each other, or how they can improve communication with the opposite sex. Of course, this isn't really surprising. Most of us want to relate better to the opposite sex, and most of us have a sense that there are differences in communication style, even if they're simply based on stereotypes. As a matter of fact, research based on transcribed speech—that is, speech which has been recorded and written down exactly as it was spoken—shows that both sexes can generally tell whether a speaker is male or female. So clearly, gender differences in language really do exist. After all, let's face it, men and women have been misunderstanding each other for generations, and that leads to problems in love relationships, challenges in professional life . . . uh . . . the workplace, and so on. Just think about this for a minute, if you will: Researchers claim we spend 70 percent of our working hours communicating and 30 per­cent of that is talking. So you can see it's essential that we learn how to communicate with each other. There are more complex reasons, though, why studying communication is important. The fact is . . . the fact . . . you need to realize that communication's not simply a matter of saying what you mean and being understood. How we say what we mean is equally crucial because it influences the way people perceive and respond to us. And how we express ourselves, our style, says a lot about how we see our own status—our power, our authority, if you like—in relation to our listen­ers. We adjust... we change the way we talk depending on who we're talking to and the impression we want to give them. In other words, our communicative style is socially conditioned. Think about that. Our communication style is socially conditioned. How we use language with others is a learned behavior, and how we talk and listen are deeply influenced by cultural expectations. Problems arise because women and men are like people who have grown up in two different subcultures. They have two broadly different styles of speaking and establishing social status based on how they've grown up. What I'd like to do now is look at how these different styles develop.

There have been many attempts to explain gender dif­ferences in communication styles, with genetics and the environment both at the top of the list. In the case of inherent genetic factors, some suggest that differences in men and women's brain structure and hormone produc­tion contribute to differences in thought processes, and these in turn contribute to different behavior between the sexes. Precisely how much influence genetic factors have on communication compared to the environment—that's to say, how much communication style is a product of nature as opposed to nurture—is not yet clear. Uh ... nev­ertheless, evidence suggests that nature's responsible for only 1 percent of the difference in communication style between the sexes. Think about it—only 1 percent! That means the environment plays a far bigger role. Now let's stop and consider just what that means. Generally speak­ing, boys and girls tend to participate in different kinds of activities as children. These activities reflect the everyday activities of adult men and women. Girls dress baby dolls and boys build things, for example. Toy stores know this very well. Now this is a generalization, of course—there are girls who love building block sets like LEGO, for example—but just look at how toy stores arrange their toys according to activities for girls and activities for boys. And as a result of their different activities, boys and girls develop different communication styles. Girls tradition­ally practice more intimacy-related skills, and learn how to relate to others. That is, they use language to establish intimacy, as a basis of friendship. Their style is what some writers call "collaboration-oriented." When girls play house, for instance, this type of play naturally produces more collaborative communication—discussions based on relationships, and so on. Boys, on the other hand, tend to be more goal-driven or task-oriented, and practice work- related skills. They might discuss, for example, how to build a castle or lay out a track, and how to get the job done. They're encouraged more to compete with others and generally use language to establish their status in the group. You could say that their communication style is "competition-oriented" rather than collaboration-oriented.

Evidence suggests that these patterns are reinforced when children socialize with their peers. Of course, parents, teachers, and others help establish these patterns of com­munication in boys and girls by directing children's activi­ties. They buy boys construction-type gifts and girls domes­tic gifts, for instance. But they also do it subconsciously by talking to boys and girls in different ways. For example, if their children have problems, mothers tend to regulate or guide their children more than fathers . . . and they tend to be more controlling with their daughters than with their sons. Fathers, in contrast, tend to be more concerned with identifying the problem quickly and demanding a solu­tion—and they tend to do this more with their sons than with their daughters. So the mothers tend to be more con­trolling and have more rules, and the fathers tend to be more demanding of solutions. So as a result, when they are adults, men and women tend to exhibit differences in their styles of communication.

But what are these differences? Well, at a general level, there are differences in the purpose of communication— why they talk We could say that generally men talk to give information or to report—they're "goal-oriented." They focus on solving problems and are less likely to ask for help or directions—maybe because traditional social roles demand that men behave like leaders, as being in control— whether they feel that way or not. As a general rule, men try to establish status, their level of authority in a situation, but women try to establish and support intimacy, or close rela­tionships with others. This might well be because, until recendy, it was the man who was typically in the more com­petitive environment—both at work and at play—and therefore who may have been more concerned about estab­lishing, maintaining, and increasing status. Today, of course, that's changing, and this can be seen in the type of topics men and women discuss. Let's consider that next as we look at some slightly more detailed observations about gender differences in communication.

At the risk of stereotyping, I'll say that women have tended to discuss topics related to relationships, such as the home, clothes, and so on. Men, on the other hand, have tended to discuss money or business. However, that trend appears to be changing, with women talking more about work and money—no doubt due to changing social roles and the fact that more women are working. Actually, one study found that the percentage of women's conversations devoted to work and money rose from 3.7 percent in 1922 to 37.5 percent in 1990. That's more than a 33 percent jump. That speaks volumes, doesn't it?

Given the collaboration/competition distinction I men­tioned earlier, you probably won't be surprised to learn that men tend to be more aggressive and argumentative than women, and use more expletives—strong language, in other words. They want to get their point across. Also as you might expect, women are more successful with interper­sonal tasks, it seems—in particular, comforting, persuading, and justifying decisions. They also tend to be better listen­ers than men. One aspect of this is how they listen; accord­ing to various studies, in conversations women use more "mm-hmm," "rights," and so on, to show they're listening.

And what about nonverbal communication? Well, women show greater skills in sending and understanding nonverbal messages. Also, they're less likely to signal domi­nance. Typical male body language, on the other hand— wide gestures, sitting with knees apart, and so on—often displays status and dominance by increasing personal space. Finally, men tend to stammer more than women and use more "ums" and "uhs" when they speak. They're more rest­less, use more hand gestures in conversation, and tend to speak too loudly.

Now, before I finish, a few final thoughts for you to go away with. As I've said, male/female communication styles are mainly a social phenomenon. Given that society's con­stantly changing, we can also expect communication styles to change to reflect the changing roles of men and women. More women, for example, are working and rising to posi­tions of power and authority in business, and this is chang­ing how they communicate. Likewise, as men take on more domestic duties—take more responsibility for things like raising children, for example—their styles also changing. I've heard it said that language has prevented womenfrom taking on new roles in society and achieving true equality with men. One way to deal with this may be for parents to change—or at least vary the kinds of activities they encour­age their children to engage in. This will change theway parents talk to their children and therefore children's own ideas about how they should speak. Perhaps we also need to reduce gender segregation—get boys and girls playing together more—so they develop more similar styles. In other words, the way we bring up and educate our children is important. In fact, the changes could be quite **dramatic!**

I'd like to close by adding two final words of caution. Firstly, when we talk about male and female differences of any kind, it's easy to fall into the trap of stereotyping men and women. Stereotypes are based on generalizations— which, of course, do not apply to everyone. What's more, even if generalizations are accurate enough at one point in time, society changes, as we've seen, and it may take some time for the ideas behind the generalizations to reflect those changes. And secondly, please bear in mind that when we talk about male and female communication styles, we have to understand that these vary from culture to culture—not surprising given the role of socialization. Therefore, most of the things I've been saying apply to North American culture but might not apply to all cultures. OK, that's it for today.

Keys.

Unit 1. Gender Differences in Language

**Vocabulary Preview, Part A**

Possible Answers:

1. an incorrect idea that many people have of what a particular type of person is like
2. separation of different groups of people
3. current; modern
4. opinion; feeling
5. very important; necessary
6. strengthened; supported
7. to show
8. to start
9. inherited; present at birth
10. powerful
11. focused on
12. to participate in

**Listening for Main Ideas, Part B**

1. с 2. b 3. b 4. b 5. b 6. с

**Listening for Details, Part B**

(Note: Corrected statements may vary.)

1. T
2. F (We spend 70% of our working hours communicating)
3. F (Genetic factors influence a lot male and female communication style)
4. T
5. F (…helps develop collaboration-oriented communication style)
6. T
7. T
8. F (male and female communication styles are not the same in all cultures)

**Gender Differences in Language**

**Quiz Audioscript, Part A**

What rose 33 percent between the 1920s and the 1990s?

What can people generally guess from transcribed speech?

What percentage of our work hours do we spend communicating?

What percentage of gender differences in communi­cation styles is caused by the environment?

What phrase describes women's communication style?

According to the speaker, what two topics have men tended to discuss?

**Answer Key, Part A**

a 2. a 3. с 4. c 5. b 6. b

Answer Key, Part В

Sample Answers:

1. Both genetic and environmental factors cause gender differences. Genetic factors include differences in men and women's brain structures and hormone pro­duction. Environmental factors include how boys and girls are socialized.
2. Boys tend to practice more work-related skills, such as building a truck. These activities are more competition-oriented. In contrast, girls tend to practice more intimacy-related skills, such as dress­ing baby dolls and playing house. These activities are more collaboration-oriented.